NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
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MEU(SOC)S AND CINC'S

by

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Major USMC

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The contents of this paper reflect my own personel views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy

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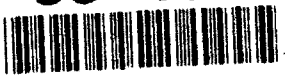

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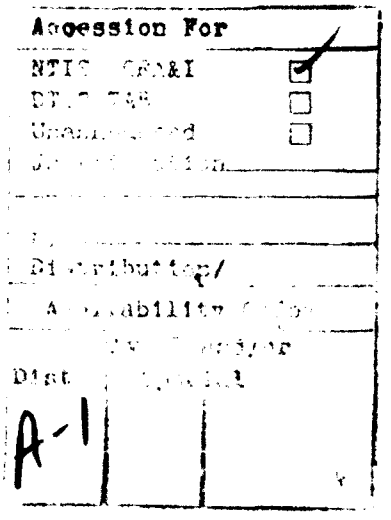

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Chapter I

Introduction

The "National Military Strategy " for the 1990's outlines a strategy of regional stability, power projection and crisis response to promote peace and global security[1]. Since the collapse of the former Soviet Union, an average of over 40 conflicts are ongoing daily throughout the world.[2] The United States responds to these crises when strategic interests are in question or when actively supporting the United Nations in its attempt to resolve a crisis. For today and for the near future, unrest and turmoil will characterize the former Soviet States as they seek independence and pursue their goals. Ethnic struggles also will continue to characterize this region. In the Middle East, the religious struggles and tensions between Israel and Arab nations will continue to undermine stability. In Africa, unstable governments will continue to combat starvation and contend with the increasing need for medicine. As the United States continues to apply its national strategy, a likely response will be the employment of the forward deployed Special Operations Capable Marine Expeditionary Unit [MEU(SOC)]. This study will not only confirm that the MEU(SOC) has operational utility in the pursuit of the National Military Objectives but focus on the interaction between the Commander in Chief (CINC) of a region and the MEU(SOC) unit.

This paper begins with basic assumptions and then follows a logical progression with an overview of the MEU(SOC) missions and training, the CINC's options for use of the MEU(SOC), CINC strategic assessments, the interface between the CINC and the MEU(SOC), and finally problems facing MEU(SOC)s.

Assumptions

The following assumptions provide the baseline from which this study will proceed:

1. The 1995 base force level will not hamper the current MEU(SOC) forward deployment schedule[3],[4].

2. Future National Objectives remain consistent with those of today.

3. Global war in the near term is unlikely[5].

4. Increase in world-wide proliferation of advanced weapons and technology will continue as will some nations willingness to use them[6].

5. The United States' access to overseas bases will remain at the current level or decline.

6. The United States cannot be guaranteed overflight rights that it currently enjoys today.

7. Given the current state of international affairs, regional conflicts are more, not less, likely to occur[7].

Chapter II

Marine Expeditionary Units

The Marine Corps continues to organize its combat forces in integrated, combined arms Marine Air-Ground Task Forces (MAGTF's). Comprised of a ground combat, aviation combat, combat service support and a command element, each MAGTF is manned and equipped toward the mission. The Marine Expeditionary Unit is smaller than both the Marine Expeditionary Force and Marine Expeditionary Brigade but has no definite size relationship to a Special Purpose MAGTF.

Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable)

The Special Operations Capable MEU [MEU(SOC)] concept emerged in 1985. The intent of the concept was not to compete with or to replace "Special Operations Forces" but to field a more capable forward deployed MEU. The unit contains a reinforced infantry battalion for its ground combat element (GCE), a composite helicopter squadron for its aviation combat element (ACE), a combat service support group for its combat service support element (CSSE) and a command element (CE) commanded by a colonel (0-6). To be designated special operations qualified, a MEU and an Amphibious Squadron (PHIBRON) of three to five amphibious ships jointly train and must successfully complete: an amphibious landing exercise (PHIBLEX),

a supporting arms exercise (SACEX) and a special operations capable exercise (SOCEX).

The MEU(SOC) is routinely the smallest forward deployed MAGTF. Of the MAGTF's, the MEU(SOC)'s greatest advantage is its responsiveness. Limited forcible entry capability, if any, is its greatest disadvantage. This point can not be over emphasized. Although the actual size of a MEU(SOC) is largely determined by the number and types of amphibious ships available, the average size is about 2,200 Marines and Sailors (Medical personnel). MEU(SOC)'s are trained and equipped to execute 24 missions to include Non-Combatant Evacuations (NEO), Humanitarian Assistance, Amphibious Raids, In-Extremis Hostage Rescue (IHR) and Airfield Seizures[1]. A full list of missions is provided in Appendix I.

Rating a MEU SOC

To be certified as "Special Operations Capable", each Marine Expeditionary Unit must successfully complete a SOCEX before deploying. This evaluation/exercise concludes the six month joint training period. Characterized by rapid action planning the evaluation is normally completed in less than three consecutive days. Routinely, the scenario is constructed in such a manner that objective locations require the Commander of the Task Force (CATF) and the Commander of the Landing Force (CLF) to displace assets away from the immediate vicinity of the command cell. Mission execution within six hours of receipt of a warning or alert order and successful mission accomplishment are over-riding considerations during the evaluation. Any MEU could accomplish

many, if not all, of the MEU(SOC) missions given enough time to plan and rehearse. However, the MEU(SOC) is distinguished by its capability to execute an assigned mission within six hours.

The typical scenario includes a Non-combatant Evacuation Operation (NEO), a Heliborne raid or Tactical Recovery of Aircraft and/or Personnel (TRAP) that necessitates the use of a Forward Arming and Refueling Point (FARP), a company-sized raid by combat rubber raiding craft (CRRC) from over the horizon (OTH), a raid on a gas or oil platform (GOPLAT) and an In-Extremis hostage rescue (IHR).

As mentioned earlier, the distance between objectives and the execution time constraints often require the Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) and the MEU(SOC) to divide assets. This capability is significant in that it shows the ability to further task organization and execute more than one mission at a time. Solving crisis situations will often require this capability.

The MEU(SOC) is a highly trained, flexible, diverse force capable of executing a litany of missions on short notice. The joint training and evaluation insures that each deploying MEU(SOC) is fully capable of conducting the missions delineated by Headquarters Marine Corps (HQMC).

Chapter III

MEU(SOC) and the CINC

The Navy-Marine Corps team will continue serving as the primary element of our nations forward presence, especially as opportunities for the overseas basing of American forces decline...Our [forces] will be positioned forward to deter crises, and will be on-scene to respond should deterrence fail...Our forward-presence posture means we will be asked to conduct disaster relief, humanitarian assistance, and non combatant evacuation operations, a traditional role our military forces have performed exceptionally well through the years[1].

Historically, Marine Expeditionary Units have routinely been assigned missions that are inherent to the lower end of the conflict continuum. But, is this small force a viable tool for the CINC to use in his entire theater strategy? Examining the capabilities of a MEU(SOC) and then relating them to the principles used in developing operational strategy will lead to a conclusion that the MEU(SOC) is a unique and critical tool available to the CINC. This equates to the CINC (Operational-level-Commander) being able to consistently plan for the use of a MEU(SOC) not only in crisis contingencies but also in theater level campaigns.

Littoral Environment

When defining the environment that armed forces will most likely operate in, factors such as population density, commerce centers and location of US diplomats are useful. The following statistics define this environment:

* 50% of the world population lives within 50 miles of the sea[2].

* 80% of the world population lives within 150 miles of the sea[3]

* 87% of the locations around the world where the US has established a diplomatic presence are within 300 miles of the sea[4].

* Over 70% of the US total trade by value and 99.7% of our overseas export and import tonnage move by sea[5].

The Marine Corps conducted a study of the "Expeditionary Environment" which included third world countries and regions likely of Marine Corps deployment. Reasons for deployment range from deterrence to theater level war. Listed are considerations common to several of the 67 countries that were analyzed[6]:

* 45 countries were involved in regional conflict, civil war(s), insurgencies, drug related conflict(s) or were characterized by conditions of repression and instability.

* 40 countries do not have usable ports and will require in-stream off-loading of Maritime Pre-positioned Ships (MPS) and assault follow on echelon (AFOE) vessels.

* 12 countries do not have airfields large enough to handle C-5 aircraft.

Therefore, the environment that most likely will see the employment of forces will be near or on the coast and may have only limited useable ports or airfields.

Crisis Response

The art of managing crises in many areas is delicate and requires the ability to orchestrate the appropriate response to

send precisely tailored diplomatic, economic and military signals to influence the actions of the adversaries[7]. Crisis response is the raison d' etre of the MEU(SOC)[8]. The forward deployed MEU(SOC) is the CINC's on hand, trained and equipped force of choice. The forward deployed MEU(SOC) is also many times the most expedient military response available.

When a crisis develops the "window of opportunity", the amount of time available to solve the crisis, may be an over-riding consideration for selecting a course of action. This window may be large enough that several options could be used to solve the crisis. Conversely, the window of opportunity may be so slight that it becomes a "now or never" situation. The size of the window coupled with the need for a secure base from which to operate many times results in the MEU(SOC) being the only military option available to the CINC. Expanded on in the remainder of this chapter are issues that can impact the CINC's options.

Mobility and Sustainability

Mobility for purposes of this study refers to the mobility provided by the amphibious shipping. Unobtrusive access to the coastlines from the sea lends itself to the employment of the MEU(SOC) in response to a regional crisis or a natural disaster. Additionally, the MEU(SOC) deploys with 15 days of self sustainment allowing the CINC to deploy the MEU(SOC) first and then arrange for additional sustainment supplies, if needed.

Operation SHARP EDGE (Liberian Neo) took seven months (223 days) before it was complete[9]. Closely related to sustained engagements is the need to loiter which was also a factor in Operation SHARP EDGE. Advantages gained with sustainment and the ability to loiter permits the CINC to position a MEU(SOC) in the vicinity of a possible crisis. This results in a reduction of the response time if the national leadership chooses to execute other options first. While the ARG/MEU(SOC)'s mobility and sustainability permit it to arrive and remain off any coast, transit time to a particular location may, in itself, preclude the employment of a MEU(SOC). Based on a speed of 19 Knots (456 miles per day),an ARG/MEU(SOC) operating off the coast of Israel would take a minimum of 11 days to transit to Liberia. Should the crisis require an immediate response, transit time could prevent the use of a MEU(SOC) as an option.

Flexibility

Flexibility can be approached from two different aspects at the CINC level. The MEU(SOC), because its capabilities (missions, sustainability, mobility), permits the CINC consider its use in many of its Flexible Deterrent Options (FDO's). Additionally, the MEU(SOC) has the flexibility of executing missions by air or surface means, day or night, near the coastline or from over-the-horizon (OTH). As such, not only can a CINC plan to use a MEU(SOC) to execute a certain portion of his strategy but he is not restricted to a specific time to begin the

operation. Operation EASTERN EXIT (Somalian NEO), where two CH-53's were launched at night 450 miles to sea, demonstrated the OTH capability. The other aspect of flexibility demonstrated was that the helicopter launch time was predicated on a pre-dawn evacuation[10]. Although it is the flexibility of the ARG/MEU(SOC) that allows for its employment in many situations, the same flexibility may limit the size and capability of the execution force. For example, if the objective area is located in excess of 50 miles from the ARG, operational limitations of the helicopters may prevent their use. (Based on 1.5 hours fuel endurance of the CH-46.) This was evident during the Somalian NEO when only CH-53's could be used.

A list of additional examples of how the CINC is able to employ the ARG/MEU(SOC) in his FDO's and in his theater strategy are provided in Appendix II.

Deception/Operations Security

The US Army's Operations Manual (FM 100-5) suggests that any operational plan must seek to achieve surprise. An integral part of any plan of campaign or major operation is the deception plan[11]. The following are possible examples that take advantage of the MEU(SOC) capabilities[12]:

* Movement of forces into crisis regions without revealing exact destinations or intentions.
* Entering and exiting the battle area day or night.
* Operating from over-the-horizon without electronic emissions and by surface or air.

The most recent use of deception was the heliborne feint used during Operation Desert Storm. The 13th MEU(SOC) launched a heliborne assault force 65 miles to sea toward Ash Shuaybah. After action reports of the Gulf confirm that this feint was clearly as successful as envisioned[13].

Chapter IV

Interface Between the CINC and the MEU(SOC)

As part of the United States forward presence strategy, MEU(SOC)s are scheduled and regularly deployed to specific regions of the world. The MEU(SOC)s report to the CINC's to support his theater strategy, participate in scheduled exercises and conduct operations as directed by the CINC. There is an opportunity for interaction between the MEU(SOC) and the CINC long before the MEU(SOC) arrives in theater that currently does not exist.

Standard Deployments

Typically, MEU(SOC)s sourced from the East Coast of the United States (from II MEF, Camp Lejuene, North Carolina), operate in the Mediterranean under the control of the European Command (EUCOM). Likewise, MEU(SOC)s sourced from the West Coast of the United States (from I MEF, Camp Pendleton, California), operate in the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf under the control of the Central Command (CENTCOM)[1]. While EUCOM and CENTCOM enjoy the continued availability of the MEU(SOC)s, other CINC's do not. The Southern Command (SOCOM) and the Atlantic Command (LANTCOM) are examples of regional CINCs that do not have a scheduled MEU(SOC) available to them. Although the operating areas of the MEU(SOC)s could change based on guidance from the

Secretary of Defense[2] regional activities indicate that the current deployment location and schedule will continue.

Strategic Estimates

All CINC's conduct strategic estimates after reviewing their theater strategic environment, the threats, and the nature of anticipated operations and missions. It is a continuous process based on the strategic direction CINC's receive from the National Command Authority (NCA). Part of the strategic estimate directly considers the potential role of land, maritime and air forces within the theater[3]. Although the estimate can rarely predict a rapid developing crisis, other situations will take longer to develop and therefore be more predictable.

No Early Interface Between the CINC and the MEU(SOC)

Currently, PHIBRON and MEU staff's are briefed on the current and the forecasted theater situation before the ARG/MEU(SOC) enters the theater. Further, this briefing takes place after the formal training and evaluation have been completed. Thus, the MEU(SOC) enters the theater with few remaining opportunities for additional training in specific areas identified in these briefings.

Logically then, if the CINC anticipates certain activities within a region, MEU(SOC)s should be given access to that portion of the strategic estimate that involves, or possibly involves, their use. The justification for this information is two-fold. First, emphasis could be placed on certain aspects of their

training to further streamline their Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)s. Second, it would afford the ARG/MEU(SOC) the opportunity to conduct specialized training on sites not available to them once deployed. Similarly, the Special Operations Training Group (SOTG) should also have access to this same information. Since the SOTG is responsible for guiding units through the special skills training and evaluating the SOCEX, they in turn could use this information to emphasize certain aspects of the training. This does not advocate that a MEU(SOC) should not train in all the missions delineated by HQMC. It does, however, give the MEU Commander, the SOTG, and the PHIBRON the latitude to adjust training emphasis during the training and evaluation cycle.

Possibilities in the Future

In September of 1988, the Summer Olympics were held in Seoul, South Korea. At one point, two Carrier Battle Groups (CBVG)s were operating in the Sea of Japan providing an augmented U.S. Naval presence[4]. In a future situation, if the Olympics were to be held in a country where the United States has limited, if any, base rights to stage from or use, a MEU(SOC) could be placed nearby as a reaction force. In this case, if the MEU(SOC) was aware of their possible use in this contingency, they could have placed emphasis on certain aspects of their training. Examples could be Security Operations, Missions in Urban Terrain, and Reinforcement Operations.

The most recent example of this lost opportunity was with the employment of the 15th MEU(SOC) into Somalia for Operation PROVIDE HOPE. Training could have emphasized Security Operations, Missions in Urban Terrain, Airfield Seizures, and Convoy Escorting. Admittedly, convoy escorting is not a specifically defined mission of a MEU(SOC) but none-the-less a critical task in security operations.

Additional Interface Deficiencies

CINC's also can assist themselves and the MEU(SOC)s with more thorough plans involving Non-combatant Operations. Operation Eastern Exit brought to light certain deficiencies that existed in the Somalian NEO. Embassy location, lack of secure communication links and an outdated NEO package were some of the deficiencies. It is likely that similar deficiencies exist in other countries as well[5]. If a MEU(SOC) is likely to execute a NEO, the sooner this information becomes available to the MEU(SOC) the sooner deficiencies can be identified.

Improvements can be made for the CINC, the MEU(SOC), and the relationship between the CINC and the MEU(SOC). Opportunities exist to strengthen areas that will increase the chances of success. As the threats we face become more capable and more technologically sophisticated, shrinking both battle space and reaction time, we will not have the luxury of a practice shot; we will have to do things right the first time[6].

Chapter V

Problems

Decline of the Defense Budget

As the United States is likely to shift its focus more toward domestic issues, budgetary reductions are likely to impact the Department of Defense(DOD). In 1992, the operating and maintenance budget for DOD was $92.5 billion. In 1993, the budget is set for $86.5 billion[1]. Therefore, more cost effective training will become a necessity; or training will decrease, resulting in the acceptance of more risk. An easy way to reduce training costs is to train more toward a specific threat or to concentrate on the probability of situations vice the possibility of situations[2]. In a constrained fiscal environment, a well trained and educated force will provide the highest payoff for our investment[3].

Most recently, President Clinton has asked for an additional budget reduction of $10.8 billion from DOD of which 3 billion is expected to come from the Department of the Navy. Difficult, calculated decisions will have to be made as to where these reductions will be. Overseas bases are likely targets. If so, the result may leave CINCs with fewer options in crisis situations. Once again, the MEU(SOC) may be considered as part of the solution but only if the current deployment schedules are maintained.

Perishable Skills

While the MEU(SOC) may give the appearance of being the solution to many crises, it does have inherent limitations. Some limitations are only exposed when a MEU(SOC) is employed in an operation and training is no longer available. The CINC should be fully aware of these limitations. A conscious decision must be made before employing the MEU(SOC) on certain extended operations with respect to the MEU(SOC)'s future capabilities.

Use of night vision goggles by the ACE provides the MEU(SOC) with a night heliborne capability restricted only by severe weather. Most recently, deploying MEU(SOC)s are Low Light Level (LLL) rated allowing them to operate unrestricted with no moon or residual light. While this capability permits operations to be conducted at almost any time, it is not inherently risk free without continuous training.

Similarly, the Force Recon Det contained in the MEU(SOC) is responsible for conducting the close quarter battle portion of an IHR. Continuous marksmanship training is required to maintain a sufficient level of accuracy equating to both lethality when needed and the lowest possible risk to the hostages. Only through continuous training is this team capable of exercising its tasks without a dramatic increase in risk or potential mission failure.

ARG Shipping

Without amphibious shipping, the MEU(SOC) is just another highly trained military force. Amphibious shipping is the

MEU(SOC)s life line. In 1945 the "Gator Navy" was comprised of 1,728 amphibious ships. In 1979 there were 65 ships and in 1992 a mere 60[4]. By October 1997, the Navy has proposed the retirement of 24 amphibious ships prior to the end of their 35-year service life[5]. In order to maintain the current amphibious force, funding for an additional 15 ships by 2007 will be necessary[6]. Unless a service life extension program is established for the aging amphibious ships, aircraft carriers or other platforms will have to augment the amphibious force or standard MEU(SOC) deployments of today will cease to exist. The feasibility of augmenting aircraft carriers is a topic currently under scrutiny and the subject of much debate.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

The National Military Strategy depends heavily on forward presence and crisis response. MEU(SOC)s have successfully been used in the past couple of years to this end thereby proving their value. The use of MEU(SOC)s in a wide variety of situations ranging from combat operations to disaster relief to NEO's to peace keeping operations, shows their versatility and importance to the National Command Authority and to the CINC as well. Employment of the ARG/MEU(SOC) is, however, often situational dependant. There is a missing dialog between the CINC and the MEU(SOC). Once established, it could result in a keener force for anticipated activities. The declining budget and exploitation of weapons by third-world countries will require a force that can make fewer mistakes than ever before. Creating this dialog will allow for greater emphasis on certain portions of ARG/MEU(SOC) training, thus resulting in a force more prepared to meet the challenges it will face during its deployment. The MEU(SOC) is our nation's force of choice in the forward deployed arena and with incremental adjustments it will continue to be so.

Appendix I

The 24 missions of the MEU(SOC):

Amphibious Raids
Security Operations
Limited Objective Attacks
Mobile Training Teams
Non-combatant Evacuation Operations (NEO)
Show of Force Operations
Reinforcement Operations
Civil Military Operations
Humanitarian/Civil Assistance
Disaster Relief
Tactical Deception Operations
Airfield Seizure
Counterintelligence Operations
Initial Terminal Guidance
Fire Support Control
Electronic Warfare/Signal Intelligence
Military Operations in Urban Terrain (MOUT)
Recovery Operations-Clandestine
Tactical Recovery of Aircraft and/or Personnel (TRAP)
Specialized Demolition Operations
In-Extremis Hostage Rescue (IHR)
Reconnaissance and Surveillance
Maritime Interdiction Operations (MIO)
Operations involving Gas and Oil Platforms (GOPLATS)

APPENDIX II

Additional list of possibilities for employment of the MEU(SOC) by the CI[illegible][1]

* Securing staging areas for introduction of follow-on forces
* Conducting combat operations ashore using inherent combat service support
* Projecting measured amounts of power ashore, if necessary
* Introducing additional forces, sequentially in theater
* Conducting operations independent of established airfields, basing agreements, and/or overflight rights
* Restoring stability through temporary retention of forces in theater of operations. stability
* Extracting Special Forces at the conclusion of their mission[2]

NOTES

ABSTRACT

1. Cash, p. ii.

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1. Thomas, p. 38.
2. General Mundy, CMC, A lecture at the Naval War College, 14 December, 1992.
3. Thomas, p. 38.
4. Thomas, p. 9.
5. Dutil, p. 52.
6. Ibid .
7. Ibid .

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1. Hayden, p. 12.

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1. Thomas, p. 38.
2. Garrett, p. 44.
3. Garrett, p. 38.
4. Garrett, p. 31.
5. Trost, p. 93.
6. US Marine Corps, MCCDC, Chapter I.
7. O'Keefe, p. 20.
8. Batcheller, p. 29.
9. O'Keefe, p. 19.

10. CNA Memorandum 91-211.

11. US Army FM 100-5 p. 53.

12. CNA Memorandum 89-315.

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2. JCS Pub-02, p. 3-9.

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4. CNA Memorandum 89-315.

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2. Thomas, p. 9.

3. Garrett, p. 44.

4. Fallon, p. 71.

5. Hayes, p. 79.

6. Hayes, p. 80.

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